

TRIBUTE TO ARMY SERGEANT
MARK VECCHIONE OF EASTHAM,
MA

HON. WILLIAM D. DELAHUNT

OF MASSACHUSETTS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, July 28, 2006

Mr. DELAHUNT. Mr. Speaker, a community is gathering to remember a young man who died far away from his home of Eastham on Cape Cod, in a place made infamous through the fury of war. Today, he returns to the place of his youth, to be mourned and to rest forever where peace holds its gentle sway.

Army Sergeant Mark Vecchione was the typical, all-American kid who had a fear of spiders, but confessed his greatest weakness was seeing a little kid upset. He went to Iraq, not as part of a conquering Army, but to help establish that fundamental human value that all people everywhere—especially children—should never have to live in fear.

As the Bible tells us, "Blessed is the peacemaker; for they shall be called the children of God. Blessed are those who mourn; for they shall be comforted." SGT Vecchione was a soldier determined to bring peace to a war-torn land. Now he is in a place to join with Him to bring some comfort to those who gather to mourn his passing.

I ask that all of my colleagues in the House take a moment to read the following commentary that recently appeared in the Cape Cod Times about this young man.

[From the Cape Cod Times]

FIRST CAPE SOLDIER KILLED IN IRAQ

(By Robin Lord and Jason Kolnos)

Cynthia DesLauriers and her daughter, Lori Vecchione, were sitting on their deck in the evening breeze Tuesday when a government car pulled up to the house. At first, DesLauriers, who is a front desk clerk at the Eastham Post Office, thought it was someone from the U.S. Postal Service. But, when men in military uniforms stepped out, DesLauriers knew her worst fears had been realized.

"They didn't even have to say anything. I just said, 'No, no, no, it's not happening,'" she said yesterday, a little more than 12 hours after she learned her only son and youngest child, Mark Vecchione, 25, had been killed in Iraq.

The Army sergeant, who had written on his personal myspace.com Web page that "getting home alive" was his No. 1 goal this year, died Tuesday somewhere in Iraq.

He was killed when the tank he was riding in ran over an "improvised explosive device" or IED. As the head gunner in the tank, he may have been riding halfway out of the vehicle when it was hit, according to what an Army official told his mother. The Army official did not reveal the exact location of his death or his body to DesLauriers, or any other details surrounding his death, pending an investigation and report, she said.

Vecchione died exactly two weeks after he had returned to Iraq from a short leave with his family in Eastham.

He was on his second tour of duty in Iraq, which was due to end in six months.

Although Vecchione moved to Tucson, Ariz., when he was a junior in high school to live with his now deceased father, Guy Vecchione, he is the first person who was born and raised on Cape Cod to die in the war that began more than three years ago.

"If you were going to go to war, you'd want to go with him," said Al Cestaro, a re-

tired sergeant in the Army's 501st Airborne Division, who has known Vecchione since kindergarten in Eastham.

Cestaro called his friend "selfless and kind." As an Army sergeant, he said Vecchione had "an undying dedication to his soldiers."

Vecchione was honored to be serving his country, Cestaro said.

"We all knew as soldiers the price of freedom is you have to see your friends die, or you die. But he didn't want to die any other way than knowing he was protecting his family."

When Vecchione re-enlisted after his first tour of duty, Cestaro said he asked him why he wanted to go back to the dangers and the horrors of war. He said Vecchione told him he didn't want to let his comrades down.

There are about 132,000 U.S. troops serving in Iraq. As of 10 a.m. yesterday, 2,554 soldiers have been killed and about 19,000 injured.

Another friend from childhood, Vicki Fulcher of South Yarmouth, called the Army Vecchione's "passion." Both Cestaro and Fulcher parted with Vecchione when he was home earlier this month, stopping at one of his favorite places, the Land Ho in Orleans, and enjoying cookouts.

To his sister, Lori, Vecchione was her best friend. He was "very brave, smart, with a heart of gold and nerves of steel," she said. And he was also a hero to her five-year-old son, Sebastian.

To his mother, he was "just my little boy who was always watching out for us."

With tears welling in her eyes frequently and her face etched with the numbness and weariness that only sudden grief can bring, DesLauriers said her son was "very proud" to be serving in Iraq, but "was afraid at times" of the dangers.

A glance at Vecchione's myspace.com Web page reveals a man with a deep love for his family, especially his nephew Sebastian. He called his late father, who died last year, his hero.

He listed spiders as his greatest fear, but posted several pictures of himself holding a 5-foot machine gun in Iraq.

And he joked that the club he belonged to while attending Sahuaro High School in Tucson was the "Reserved Seat In the Principal's Office Club." He regrets most not doing a better job while in school. A Catholic man who wanted to be a pilot when he grew up, he said his greatest weakness was "seeing little kids upset."

When Vecchione left the Cape to live with his father in Tucson, he befriended Travis Wilson and his sister Bambi Anaya.

"He was the kind of person you could talk to about anything," said Anaya, 27, reached at her Arizona home yesterday. "He was that spot of sunshine in all of our lives."

Wilson, 26, an Army sergeant currently stationed in Fort Knox, Ky., called Vecchione "the greatest human being I have ever met and I'm honored to have had my life touched by him."

It was in July of 2001 when Vecchione, Wilson and another friend all decided to join the Army. Wilson said in addition to seeing it as a way to help his country, Vecchione saw the military as an avenue for personal growth before someday going to college.

At the Eastham Post Office on Route 6 yesterday morning, patrons were halted in their tracks at the door, where acting Postmaster Donald Rogers had posted a notice of Vecchione's death.

"It's a small community where everybody knows everybody," he said.

Recent photos of Vecchione in his uniform and with Sebastian are tacked up on the wall at the desk, as well as on the computer his mother uses. Customers often asked DesLauriers how he was doing, said postal clerk Mark Godfrey.

"I got the impression she got a lot of comfort from that," he said.

In addition to his mother, sister and nephew, Vecchione is survived by an uncle, Donald Vecchione of East Orleans; an aunt and uncle, Brenda and Jeff Vecchione of Eastham; and a cousin. Tye Vecchione of Chatham, Services will be held at a later date.

HONORING RONNIE BARRETT FOR
BEING NAMED A 2006 ENTRE-
PRENEUR OF THE YEAR

HON. BART GORDON

OF TENNESSEE

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, July 28, 2006

Mr. GORDON. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate Ronnie Barrett for being named a 2006 Ernst and Young Entrepreneur of the Year. Ronnie is a friend and a resident of my hometown of Murfreesboro, Tennessee. He is the president and founder of Barrett Firearms and with this award, he is now eligible for the title of National Entrepreneur of the Year at the annual awards held in November.

Entrepreneurship is nothing new to Ronnie. Twenty-five years ago, he was a professional photographer with his own business and an idea of how to build a better rifle. Using engineering skills he taught himself, he labored in his garage workshop and by 1987, he held a patent for his invention, .50 caliber rifle that could be shoulder-fired.

Since then, Ronnie has become the premier manufacturer of .50 caliber rifles. In 1989, Sweden became the first country to sign a military contract for his rifles, and more than 50 other countries have done the same. Today, his customers range from sportsmen to the U.S. military. In fact, the U.S. Army last year named his M107 rifle as one of the "Ten Greatest Inventions."

I wish Ronnie all the best at the national awards, and I wish him many more years of success.

RECOGNIZING THE SESQUICENTEN-
NIAL OF THE FIRST CHRISTIAN
CHURCH OF MUIR (MICHIGAN)

HON. VERNON J. EHLERS

OF MICHIGAN

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, July 28, 2006

Mr. EHLERS. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to offer recognition of the 150th anniversary of the First Christian Church of Muir, Michigan. It is located in Ionia County, part of the Third Congressional District of Michigan, which I represent. The church will celebrate its sesquicentennial on September 7, 2006.

The First Christian Church of Muir is part of the Michigan Region of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and has great historical significance within that denomination. The church was formed in 1856 at about the same time the village of Muir was organized. Some members of the community called upon a friend, the Rev. Isaac Errett of Ohio, to come to Michigan to establish a church.

The church held its first meeting on a cold, mid-winter morning, when parishoners gathered at the edge of the Grand River with temperatures that reached 31 degrees below